FY 2009 NOAA BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

National Marine Fisheries Service

Habitat Conservation and Restoration

Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) FY 2009 budget request includes an increase of $1.5 million to implement the new *Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program* mandated by the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 2006 (MSRA). The program will use funding to identify, understand, and provide information needed to protect deep sea coral habitats.

Overview: Recent research has revealed that coral and sponge habitats with very high biological diversity exist in deep ocean areas of many U.S. marine ecosystems. These areas are vulnerable to damage from bottom-tending fishing gears and other human activities. Recovery from damage may take decades to centuries as most deep sea corals grow slowly. The President's *Ocean Action Plan* calls for enhanced research, surveying and protection of deep sea coral communities.

The funds sought will support priority activities of the MSRA-mandated *Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program.* Activities will be undertaken cooperatively under the Coral Reef Conservation Program by multiple NOAA offices, and in coordination with the Regional Fishery Management Councils and other partners. This initiative will help the Councils and NOAA identify deep sea coral zones and enhance conservation of these important ecosystems.

NOAA requests $1.5 million in 2009 to:

- *Conduct research on deep sea corals and related species.*

NOAA will conduct research focusing on the ecology of deep sea corals and their role and function in supporting various life stages of managed fish stocks.

- *Locate, map and characterize deep sea coral habitats*

Locating, mapping, and comprehensively characterizing deep sea coral and sponge habitats is central to conservation. Mapping efforts will identify areas to be protected or avoided, reducing damage to habitats and fishing gear. NOAA and its partners will conduct high-resolution surveys and ground-truthing of deep sea coral habitats and develop interpretive products such as maps. One large ecosystem will be chosen to begin new mapping efforts. Research conducted in association with dedicated mapping and characterization cruises will focus on the ecology of deep sea corals and their interactions with managed fish stocks. The program will also coordinate analysis of information from other mapping and research efforts.

- *Monitor fishing and other activities in locations where deep sea corals are known or are likely to occur*

NOAA will use currently collected information, including that from fishing industry participants, to map the distribution and intensity of fishing practices known to impact deep sea coral communities and analyze reports of coral bycatch, while ensuring appropriate confidentiality of fishing statistics. Observers in existing programs will be trained in deep sea coral and sponge identification in order to document coral and sponge bycatch. In conjunction with deep sea coral maps, this will allow for improved assessments and management of fisheries impacts.

- *Publish, in consultation with the Councils, biennial reports to Congress on steps taken to identify, monitor and to protect, deep sea coral areas*

NOAA FY 2009 Budget Request ($ in Millions)			
BUDGET LINE: **Habitat Conservation and Restoration**	FY2008 Enacted	FY2009 Program Change	FY2009 Pres Bud Request
SUSTAINABLE HABITAT MANAGEMENT **Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program**	$0	$1.5	$1.5

For more information, contact: Patricia Montanio, Director, NMFS Office of Habitat Conservation at 301-713-2325 or visit www.coralreef.noaa.gov.

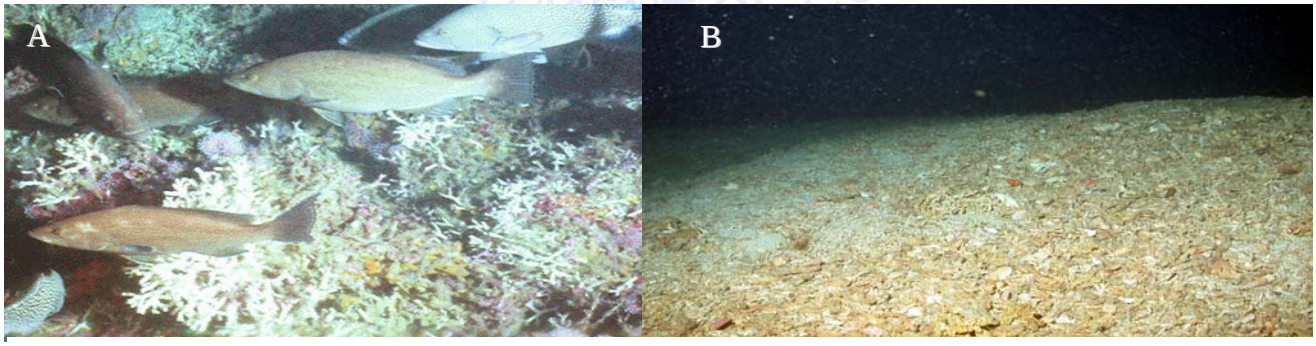

Figure: A. Groupers on healthy *Oculina* deep sea coral habitat. B. Trawled *Oculina* habitat.